

New Shopping Center To Keep Dollars in Community Albany/Schenectady/Troy, New York, EC

Residents of Arbor Hills in Albany will soon be spending their dollars at a local shopping center. The Gateway Commons initiative, sponsored by the Urban League of Northeast New York, will help redevelop the Henry Johnson Boulevard commercial corridor. The new 120,000-square-foot neighborhood shopping center in historic Arbor Hill will give residents access to quality, affordable goods and services close to their homes and will create permanent private-sector jobs.

The \$11.4-million initiative will receive \$150,000 in EC funds. Because the Commons has both EC and EZ designations, it can provide incentives for businesses to locate there, including employment tax credits; property tax abatement; discounted telephone and utility services; and low-interest property, equipment, and working capital loans.

Gateway Commons will include up to 14 new retail stores and nearly 50,000 square feet of professional office space. The Commons will have a supermarket, bank, dry cleaner, video store, fast-food restaurants, a sit-down family restaurant, a hair care products store, a dollar store, and a newsstand. The office space will be occupied by Millennium Technology Solutions, a subsidiary of National Finance Corporation; a medical facility; a satellite office of a local college; and city agencies.

The money residents spend at Gateway Commons will directly benefit their community by stimulating commercial and residential development in the area and by creating training, education, and employment opportunities for residents. The Urban League has promised to provide a minimum of 75 private, permanent, full-time jobs for EC residents and is projecting the creation of up to 400 such jobs.

Gateway Commons will have a “main street” feel created by awnings and wide sidewalks to encourage foot traffic. The site will also have benches, trees, antique street lighting, and a clock tower. At the same time, the buildings are designed to be “smart” buildings with sophisticated communications infrastructures and advanced energy and technology services, making them serviceable and marketable for years to come.

For more information contact Anthony Tozzi, Center for Economic Growth, at 518-465-8975.

Junior Museum Provides Education and Economic Opportunities

Albany/Schenectady/Troy, New York, EC

“Most people don’t see a museum working like we do. We’re in fact a community center,” says Ralph Pascale, Director of the Junior Museum in Troy, New York, which provides children with weekend and afterschool activities in science. “We’re open morning, noon, and night,” Pascale says, noting the “sleepover” programs the museum offers.

“In 1990 we began looking at ways we could work hand in hand with urban revitalization,” Pascale recalls. The museum formed a partnership with the city and began looking for a site for a new, expanded museum. They found one in the Winslow Building, the oldest building on the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) campus. They began collaborating with RPI and Russell Sage College. The EC is providing \$300,000 for construction and renovation toward the \$1.25- million initiative.

Beyond RPI are census tracts whose populations suffer from the lowest educational attainment and greatest poverty in the area. “We contribute to the goal of economic development on several fronts,” says Pascale. The museum serves as a tourist site, drawing outside dollars into the community. It also provides job training and economic opportunity for residents, who will benefit because the region is being developed as a site for microchip fabrication. The new museum will create 50 new, full-time jobs and 745 part-time jobs and will deliver at least \$600,000 in salaries to EC jobholders.

Students develop communication and job skills through hands-on learning and volunteerism. As children progress through the museum’s programs, which are intended for preschool and elementary school students, they can become helpers and junior guides. Adolescents and high school students then become involved in the administration of the museum. Students learn from older students and from college interns, who provide learning experiences and serve as positive role models. “The museum serves as a link between the community and the institute because we bring together local children and college students. A child with negative aspirations gets to meet a young person whose goal is to man the next Mars flight,” says Pascale.

The museum has been in a rehabilitated 5,500-square-foot firehouse since 1974. Construction on the 17,000-square-foot historic Winslow Building began in January after community volunteers gutted the building, removing 21 dumpsters of debris. Built in 1866, the Winslow Building was originally the Chemical Laboratory, the first place in the United States where chemistry was taught using hands-on methods. “We like to think that we are continuing that tradition,” says Pascale.

Open 7 days a week, the museum will serve a geographic area of 3 States and 14 counties, welcoming more than 1,000 people per week.

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Tech Education Centers Are a Family Affair

Albany/Schenectady/Troy, New York, EC

“The 100 Net Initiative is a family affair,” says Gregory Fields, Chair of the 100 Net Committee in Albany, New York. The technology centers will provide education and technology training to entire families, including computer training for seniors. Fields recently watched a 12-year-old work at a computer with his 8-year-old sister looking over her brother’s shoulder. The parents were absorbed in training in the next classroom.

The regional chapter of 100 Black Men, a national organization of professional men whose goal is community enrichment, is developing a regional program with help from the Albany/Schenectady/Troy EC, the Nation’s only regionally governed EC. The chapter will receive more than \$294,000 in regional EC funds to establish a \$1.5-million, regionally directed, community-based technology center in each city.

The 100 Net Initiative will provide 4,000 modules of training and serve 200 people per day. Under the initiative, GEDs and Adult Basic Education certificates will be awarded. The program will provide adults and high school students with training in computers, applied science, and technology. The program will provide tutoring and academic enrichment to children and will serve 140 Head Start and daycare children. The program will also provide high school students with teen parenting and daycare training.

The City of Albany provided a 10,000-square-foot building in 1997. One-third of the building has been refurbished and volunteers are currently teaching 24 people in 3 classes. The building includes space for classrooms, training, photocopy services, and offset printing. There will be a cyber cafe with four tables and three computers and a business incubator on the second floor. A videoconferencing center will allow communications with 11 other sites in the region.

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Neighborhood Paper Succeeds With EC Beat

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The Communicator, a free monthly neighborhood newspaper, was in trouble. Lack of advertising revenue was making it difficult to continue the newspaper's free distribution policy. At the same time, the Albany/Schenectady/Troy EC needed a way to communicate with the neighborhood residents about ongoing activities in the EC.

The match was made—in exchange for seed money of \$16,300, The Communicator hired interns to expand coverage and circulation to the entire EC. Although the paper planned to devote one or two pages each month to specific news of the EC, in fact, they are writing more than that. In exchange for this coverage, the EC program delivers The Communicator door-to-door to every EC resident and business.

Now that businesses and community organizations are assured of the paper's wide distribution, advertising revenues are up, and The Communicator is becoming an economically self-sufficient publication. Its detailed reports of EC activities has made it very popular and more widely read than ever before because it is reporting on events, information, and opportunities that residents really want to know about.

For more information, contact Anthony Tozzi, Program Director, Albany/Schenectady/Troy EC, at 518–465–8975.